

## Mysterious Skills

— *Myojutsu* as a paradigm for language teacher development —

Christopher HELLMAN

### Abstract

Despite the extensive and continuing research into pedagogical practice within the field of language teaching, there are areas which seem to have received little attention. Since these areas are not exclusive to language teaching, useful insights may be gained from the study of other fields. This article examines *Neko no Myojutsu*, an 18th century Japanese work on the study of swordsmanship and considers the ways in which it is relevant for contemporary language teaching. In particular it examines descriptions and critiques of several approaches to the development of advanced skills presented in the work and discusses them in terms of language pedagogy. It also discusses the concept of *myojutsu* and its relevance as a model for teacher development. Its value is noted as a paradigm that combines reflection and action, positioning the teacher as an active agent in his/her own development.

**Keywords :** teacher development, language pedagogy, swordsmanship, bujutsu, myojutsu

Language teaching is an area which has long been intimately concerned with how students learn, what they should be taught, and how this material should be organized and presented. Perhaps this is because, unlike many other academic disciplines, content expertise (in this case, use of the language) is often considered a 'natural' ability for the teacher. Thus much study and research in the discipline is concerned directly with instruction and learning, rather than elements of language itself. Even so, there are certain aspects of the instructional process that have received comparatively little attention, especially at the level of higher education. While teaching, be it at whatever level, involves the use of a number of skill sets, including not only the design, delivery and assessment of instruction, but also a range of interpersonal skills and knowledge of areas such as group dynamics and language acquisition theory, the effective deployment of these skills is dependent on the performance of the teacher. The factors that affect this performance are many and varied, and so developing teaching skill is far from straightforward.

Teacher education reflects this complexity, and shows a steady move away from the transmission model in which knowledge is passed down from knowledgeable instructors towards a constructivist approach in which the learner plays a larger role in the learning process (Mann, 2005). Key to this is the concept of the teacher as responsible for his or her own learning and

development through reflection, self-monitoring and self-evaluation (Roberts, 1998). Although well-developed resources are available to help the teacher in his/her development, (e.g. Richards & Farrell, 2005), the emphasis on reflection and self-direction, though undoubtedly important, seems overly cerebral when compared to the active nature of the classroom. Even when the multifaceted nature of teaching is foregrounded (e.g. Tudor, 2003) little concrete help is given in dealing with that complexity.

As noted above, teaching is a complex skill, rather than simply a knowledge set, which requires the use of many sub-skills involving more than a base competence in the language being taught and familiarity with instructional methods and theories – in addition, a whole range of inter-personal skills come into play. The necessity of utilizing these many skills while dealing with a class of students, who are themselves trying to make progress in another complex skill while following innumerable personal and social agenda, makes it a particularly hard skill to pin down, let alone develop. Furthermore, the nature of teaching is such that the practitioner essentially works alone, unobserved by and unobserving of peers, leading to a situation in which there is no clear image of what expertise consists of. Yet while this situation is challenging, the demands it places on the teacher are not unique – there are other disciplines that require the application of complex skills in unpredictable situations, while at the same time, providing clear models of expertise and directions for achieving it. Examining such disciplines may provide a useful paradigm through which to re-examine the pedagogical challenges faced in language teaching, particularly in providing direction and examples for teacher development.

### **The Model of *Bujutsu***

One example of such a discipline is provided by *bujutsu*, a general term for the classical martial arts of Japan. While it may seem an unusual choice, the theory that accompanies advanced skills in *bujutsu* provides useful insights for teaching: it is concerned with both the development and instruction of complex systems of skills, and fully acknowledges the multifarious nature of the situations in which they must be used. At its heart, it shares some surprising similarities with teaching in its understanding of human interaction.

*Bujutsu* included many specific arts, among which were those teaching archery, horsemanship, and the use of weapons such as the spear and sword. The depth of study involved, and the large number of documents dating from several hundred years ago recording aspects of the training, make these arts an interesting set of disciplines for study. It is to one of these arts, swordsmanship that we will turn for parallels to teaching.

The earliest recorded schools of swordsmanship appeared in the 15th century, and these were

clearly based on earlier traditions. The art underwent development and refinement during the period of almost constant warfare leading up to the beginning of the Tokugawa period (1603-1867), and additional refinements continued in answer to subsequent changes in social conditions. As the need for use declined, debates sprang up around the question of what was the best way to learn to fight (Friday, 1997). These centred around the twin poles of *kata* practice – the practice of fixed forms designed to develop the many skills and attributes that were part and parcel of combat through pre-arranged patterns of movement, and *shinai-geiko* – a kind of practice in which students used safer replacements for real weapons and protective equipment allowing a kind of ‘sparring’ against a resisting opponent meant to simulate the free-for-all nature of real encounters. Both approaches had their detractors, and indeed, it can be seen that both were attempts to train, safely and realistically, a skill for which any training situation can only be, at best, a simulation of the real thing.

However, what was not questioned was the ultimate goal. Unlike language, which provides limitless models of effective and ‘correct’ use, such models were not readily available in fighting arts; despite this, the theoretical approach was remarkably consistent in all the major schools. Perhaps the most accessible description is provided by *Neko no Myojutsu* “The Mysterious Skills of the Old Cat” (Issai, 1979). Before examining this text in greater detail, it should be born in mind that a text such as this positioned the teacher as being a learner, too, but considerably more advanced in his (teachers of bujutsu were overwhelmingly male, although there were exceptions) studies than his students.

### The Story

*Neko no Myojutsu* describes the inner teachings of the art of swordsmanship, and explains them, perhaps a little impressionistically, but nonetheless accurately, in terms of a fable about a group of cats who are set to catch an unusually large and fearsome rat. Swordsmanship itself appears to have dominated many of the bujutsu schools from an early period, despite the fact that the sword was only a secondary weapon on the field of battle. It is felt that this is because the sword is particularly suited to the role of elucidating these advanced aspects of martial skills (Friday, 2005). The medium of a story is also ideal for introducing these theories, and this work offers a clear and lucid explanation which is not at all marred by the fabulous element.

The story tells of a large rat that appears in the house of a samurai named Shoken. As his own cat is soundly beaten, he calls in three neighborhood cats, well-known as rat-catchers, to deal with the nuisance. They are unable to do a thing and retreat in fear. Shoken himself tries to kill the creature, but is equally at a loss. One of his servants, however, has heard of an old cat from another part of

town that is supposedly unrivalled in its skills, so Shoken has him go and fetch it. The animal he returns with is very unprepossessing in appearance, but nonetheless, Shoken decides to give it a go. The cat enters the room where the rat is, calmly walks over to it, grabs it by the scruff of its neck and drags it out, much to the astonishment of Shoken (and the other cats).

That evening, the cats gather, giving the old cat pride of place, while Shoken observes secretly. Reflecting on the days events, they ask for an explanation, and he replies by first asking each one to describe his approach to rat-catching, and then giving a critique.

The first cat explains that he has studied all the many techniques and tricks exhaustively, but that nothing he tried seemed to work on the rat. The old cat replies that although technique is important, it has limits. To rely solely on technique is asking for trouble.

The second cat explains that it has given up using techniques, and relies on the force of its presence, its strong *ki* or vital energy to overawe its prey. This time, however, the rat seemed immune, and indeed, it was the cat that was overawed. The old cat replies that although it might seem to the cat that it was awe-inspiring, this was really a subjective assessment. There were always those who could summon up more desperate energy, especially if it was a life-or-death struggle.

The third cat begins by saying that it had gone beyond the approaches described by the other two cats, realizing their flaws, and aimed at appearing totally non-aggressive, absorbing and enveloping any attacks by the opponent by refusing to offer resistance. The rat, however, had not responded to anything the cat had done and yet was irresistible. The old cat explains that although the cat attempted to be in harmony with the rat, this was a technique in itself, and while he consciously tried to use it, his opponent could detect and avoid his attempts.

The old cat then goes on to explain the ideal approach, which involves the state of 'no-mind'. As conflict involves a relationship of two opposing parties, if you harmonize with the opponent using no-mind, thus effectively refusing to enter into oppositional conflict, the opponent is unable to attack effectively – you have removed yourself as the enemy. Because you are not moving or reacting consciously, the opponent cannot predict your movement. Then, without thought or conscious planning, you can move naturally, responding to and over-coming your opponent.

Further discussion ensues when Shoken bursts out and questions the cat more closely, and in the course of discussion, the old cat reveals more of the theory surrounding no-mind and the resulting mysterious skill or *myojutsu*, admitting that he knew of another cat far more advanced than him, who appeared to do nothing, and yet wherever he was would be completely free of rats. This was something that couldn't be taught, the cat explains, the teacher could only show the way – it is the student himself who must learn.

### Relevance to Teaching

Texts of this kind do not at first appear to fit the situation of the TESOL teacher as they assume that the learner and the teacher are on the same learning continuum, albeit at different stages. In fact, these arts, strongly imbued with Confucianism, tended not to deal with the student so much as the art as a whole. This was because they made the assumption that the student followed the path laid out by the teacher. Skills could be refined, by individual practice and study, to a degree dependent on personal dedication. In this sense it has relevance to anyone engaged in an active process of learning.

The fundamental situation with which *Neko no Myojutsu* is concerned is the relationship between two opposing volitional forces. Similarly, classroom instruction is built on the relationship between the teacher and students. Although the power balance is asymmetrical, it is important to appreciate it is not simply one-way communication – it is a reciprocal relationship (Bar-Tal & Bar-Tal, 1986:139). Both teachers *and* students play active and passive roles in this interaction, which includes a range of non-verbal elements, such as yawns, giggles, smiles, frowns stretching, sitting up straight, as well as more straight-forward verbal contributions. The teacher's knowledge and ability to mediate that relationship is important in establishing the optimum conditions for learning, perhaps more so than the nature of the instruction itself (Arends, 1994; Tudor, 2001).

However, the individual actions of the teacher and the students are not the only factors that affect learning in the classroom. Another important area to consider is the behavior of the class as a group. The concept of group dynamics is based on the observation that people act collectively as well as individually (Forsyth, 2009). In an educational situation, this collective behavior can override individual differences (Dörnyei & Murphy, 2003:2). Although comparatively little research has been undertaken in this area with respect to language learning, it seems clear that, through a combination of social and psychological factors, groups can serve to support and encourage members, improve motivation and increase the quantity and quality of learning (Dörnyei, 1997). The teacher's role in this is important as style of communication, the manner of giving feedback, support and praise can directly affect factors such as motivation, group cohesiveness and classroom atmosphere, which in turn serve to increase affective factors such as perceived competence, and willingness to communicate (Dörnyei, 2001; Noels, Clement, Pelletier, 1999; Wu, 2003; Yashima, 2002). Although the precise nature of the relationships between these factors is not clear, their importance is not in doubt. The classroom is a far messier place than is often admitted (Freeman, 1996:91) and familiarity with these dimensions of teaching appear to

be a necessary part of effective instruction. It is just such considerations that form the basis of the critiques presented in *Neko no Myojutsu*, considerations which remain a constant whatever methodology and technology may be adopted.

While being a fable, it is worth reiterating that *Neko no Myojutsu* presents a view of the approaches committed practitioners adopt in the process of refining a difficult skill in which the conditions of performance can never be entirely predicted in advance; a skill which required application of complex skills in 'real time', and spontaneous adaptation to changing conditions of extreme stress. In addition, it might be added, unlike sports, in which the losers get to play next time, however hotly the game might be contested, in *bujutsu* there was usually no 'next time' for the loser.

*Neko no Myojutsu* was not written by a master swordsman, but it has long been recognized as such an accurate depiction of the approach to mastery in swordsmanship that it was, for many years, passed down by the Itto school as one of the secret volumes of that art (Watanabe, 1979). With this pedigree, I believe we are justified in regarding it as a valid paradigm from which to examine the art of teaching.

The fable, as a didactic medium, relies on the imagination of the audience for much of its effect. The parallels it draws between real life and the illustration it uses are clear but are not meant to be exact correlates. However, the relative simplicity isolates and clarifies the issue that forms the subject of the fable, and allows it to be examined more easily. In applying *Neko no Myojutsu* to teaching, the same stipulations apply: it is using an analogy to isolate and clarify approaches to performance of a complex skill: simplification is inevitable.

It is, of course, meant as a critique of (then) prevailing attitudes to the study of swordsmanship. As explained earlier, after long years of the relative peace of the Tokugawa period, there were comparatively few occasions for using swords in actual combat, and thus little occasion (or need) for actually testing one's skills. While there was general agreement on what mastery consisted of, there was some dispute over the course of study necessary to achieve this. While *meijin* or 'real' masters were few and far between, swordsmanship was widely taught, and all members of the bushi class were expected to carry swords and have some familiarity with their use.

*Neko no Myojutsu* lays out the several approaches, which it criticizes, before presenting the model approach. It is explained that these other approaches are not entirely without merit, but despite their sophistication they are based on an over simplified assessment of the dynamics of the combat situation, firstly by failing to appreciate the essential elements that constitute success and, secondly, by underestimation of the opponent.

### Application to Teaching

To enable the reader to gain a better idea of how this paradigm might be applied to teaching, I have included a re-writing of the story in a teaching context, which is included in the appendix. It may be helpful to read it before proceeding with the following section.

A very simple interpretation of the story would be to regard the four approaches as sequential stages in development: first, one learns the basic techniques of teaching; then, one learns how to apply them in the classroom; after that, one can relax and use the energy of the class to dictate the pace of learning; finally comes a blend of the two approaches, embodying both control and freedom. While this reading is possible, a more thorough analysis is necessary to explore the deeper pedagogical implications. However, even at this basic level, it is clear that Neko no Myojutsu is concerned with factors that go beyond the nature of techniques and methods to deal with questions of application.

As noted above, the methods criticized by the old cat failed due to their over-simplification of the dynamics of the combat situation, showing an understanding of neither the factors that produce success, or their opponents. In fact, these criticisms can be applied almost directly to the language classroom, and it is these insights that make the work relevant to TESOL.

In looking more deeply at the work, some care is necessary as some of these approaches are based on terms that are seldom used in describing a teaching context, and must be understood sufficiently to appreciate the last approach, the *myojutsu* or 'mysterious technique' that is offered as the model approach.

### The Flawed Approaches

Each of the unsuccessful cats utilizes a different approach to catching the rat. The first emphasizes the importance of technical excellence. In the world of teaching, this can be taken to cover the multitude of techniques and methodologies, both legitimate and fly-by-night, that make up the teacher's tool-kit. Much of this derives from initial teacher-training, during which teachers develop the skills that they will use professionally, augmented by growing experience and further professional development, including reading professional journals, attending conferences and attending training courses. As much research in language teaching is either directly or indirectly concerned with aspects of teaching, pedagogy in this field is often informed by theory. Essentially, this approach looks upon teaching as something that can be defined, goals and objectives drawn up, methods decided upon, and the whole taught through application of a well-defined curriculum.

In contrast, the second approach is directly concerned with the relational aspects of confrontation. It is described with reference to the concept of *ki*, which has no direct equivalent

in English. It is often described using terms such as 'vital energy' but in this context might most usefully be thought of as personal presence or force of personality. The technique described is that of overawing the opponent in a sort of mental battle. If we transfer this to a teaching situation, we can readily see how it relates to the teacher using force of personality to establish order, control the class, and create an optimum teaching situation. Different applications of the same approach might result in either a stern, forbidding teacher, who can quell students with a raised eyebrow or one that is enthusiastic and overtly friendly. It correlates closely with the idea of the teacher as leader, in the style known as autocratic or authoritarian leadership (Forsyth, 2009:272).

The third approach is also primarily concerned with the nature of interaction. It works by refusing to offer resistance to the opponent, thus nullifying the dangers of a clash of wills inherent in the second approach. Instead it seeks to draw him into a weak position in which he is unable to resist. In terms of teaching, this is perhaps best equated to styles which attempt to win the students over by engaging them in 'fun' activities, such as games and videos. It could also include approaches that involve the students in deciding their course of studies, either individually or as a class. In a sense, it might be correct to regard it as stimulating and using the students' own energy and enthusiasm, rather than relying on that of the teacher, to drive and direct the class. This can also be equated with leadership, but a style quite different to the second approach. This style is referred to as *laissez-faire* leadership (Forsyth, *ibid*).

### **The Critiques**

The critiques offered of these three approaches apply directly to swordsmanship, which is directly confrontational in nature. Teaching, though not a confrontation, relies on a reciprocal relationship between teacher and students, so it is interesting to see how well the critiques fit an educational situation. It is important to note that the three approaches are not described as being useless, but rather as being flawed, depending heavily on the relative strengths of the two adversaries and thus overly simplistic. In terms of teaching, it is easy to see the parallels if we compare this to teaching a 'good' and 'bad' class.

Most teachers will have had the experience of a class that was a joy to teach – eager and responsive, the students enthusiastically followed the teacher's instructions, class objectives were met easily and the whole experience was a pleasure. In teaching this kind of class, we all know that it is the class that makes the difference, not ourselves. Although we might be stimulated to better and more creative teaching by such a class, these methods will not necessarily transfer to other classes we have to teach. As teachers, we are hopeful that every class will be this good, though mindful of the fact that this is unlikely, we seek to develop our teaching to enable us to teach a range



of classes effectively. In a bad class, nothing we try seems to work well. Even our tried and trusted lessons seem jaded and dull. Keeping this in mind, it is easier to appreciate the critiques offered by the old cat.

Techniques are, opines the cat, 'outward forms'; although they contain the truth, the constant search for new and better methods and ways of doing things results in ignoring the essence of those techniques, or in other words, what really makes them work. There is a clear correlation to teaching – even in the comparatively small area of TESOL there is a continual reinvention of approaches and methods of teaching, pointing to the fact that no one approach can be regarded as universally successful. Of course, any system that attempts to prescribe methods of teaching complex skills to large numbers of learners, some of whom are bound to be dissimilar, is likely to encounter difficulties. Rather than the nature of the method itself, the fable suggests that limiting the approach to finding the right method is a problem. The complexity of the situation guarantees that no one method or technique will fit all situations or all people. What is necessary is to be aware of the essence of successful methods.

The second and third approaches are based on an understanding of the shortcomings of the quest for technical excellence, and both regard gaining control over the opponent (or the students) before applying any physical techniques, as essential to success. To do this, they emphasize psychological factors. However, both approaches have flaws: the second approach, which pits strength against strength, fails when the opponent can summon up a greater force of will than the swordsman. In teaching, a class, or members of it, might prove resistant to the efforts of the teacher to compel compliance to his/her wishes. This may occur when the student sees there is little to gain from compliance, and indeed, little to lose from non-compliance, or alternatively when other, personal, factors exert a stronger influence than the teacher. If this influence assumes a greater importance for the student than pleasing or conforming to the wishes of the teacher, it is very unlikely that anything a teacher does is going to overcome such strong resistance.

The flaw in the third approach is that the harmony the swordsman seeks is actually an imposed, conscious harmony, that can be detected by a sufficiently wary opponent. In attempting to harmonize with the opponent, the swordsman is placed in a position where he is always reacting. An opponent who understands this can use this to dictate the terms of the fight to the swordsman. A teacher may also avoid the appearance of compelling students to study by using 'fun' activities, for example, but he/she is using these activities for instructional purposes. There are obvious dangers in relying on the approval of the students to set the direction in a course of study: on the teaching side, the continuing necessity to make every class 'fun' may hinder instruction; for the students, it may create false expectations or create an atmosphere in which serious study becomes difficult.

There is also the possibility that some students may just refuse to participate in a meaningful way, thus removing much of the educational value of the activities.

This poses particular problems for the language teacher, especially when teaching students with low motivation. In speaking classes, of necessity, much of the speaking must take place between students, but unless the activities have an intrinsic element of enjoyment or interest, it can be difficult to motivate students to the extent required to gain significant educational benefit. This can lead to difficulties in providing classes with both interest and educational value and the consequent suspicion that one is doing little more than providing a species of entertainment to the class.

In fact, both the second and third approaches can be criticized from the point of view of what we know about the nature of classroom interaction. Unlike the first approach, that basically ignores the presence of students in the development of a technical approach to teaching, the second and third approaches acknowledge the importance of the interactive relationship between the teacher and the students, but fail to understand its reciprocal nature, regarding it as uni-directional. In these approaches, the students are assumed to have a largely passive, reactive role in the class. Thus, when the students exercise their initiative, the teacher finds these approaches ineffective.

### ***Myojutsu –the Mysterious Technique***

Having dismissed these approaches as flawed, the fable presents an approach that avoids these pitfalls. It is predicated on 'no-mind' and allows a kind of super-normal ability to predict and respond to the movements of the enemy through acting without conscious design. This is a difficult concept to understand, and might, on those grounds, be easily dismissed, and yet it appears repeatedly in martial literature. The term itself is often associated with Zen Buddhism, (Lisshka, 1978; Suzuki, 1959) but it is not confined to this discipline. Far from being mystical, it has concrete applications. In a western sense, confusion arises because of the term 'mind'. Although, in western culture, the mind is closely associated with cognition and mental activity in general, the term has a broader meaning in Japanese, encompassing heart and feelings as well as intellectual activity. If we regard 'no-mind' as being without thought, it is difficult to avoid associations with a kind of trance state. This is not an accurate representation. It would be easier to understand if the term was rendered as 'no volition' or even 'without thinking about it'. Of course, to act surely in a high pressure situation without thinking about what you are doing is easier said than done.

*Neko no Myojutsu* argues that this state is desirable in combat because once volition is directed against a target or a goal (thereby giving it form), it is possible to detect it and so oppose or resist it. If it has no form, there is nothing to detect, and thus nothing to resist, nothing to oppose, therefore giving the swordsman in this state the ability to attack and defend freely without the opponent

being able to react effectively. It states, “Whatever has form, has opposition, but if your mind has no form, it can have no opposition. When there is no opposition, there is (effectively) no opponent.” (Hellman, 2011:23). In this state, from a subjective point of view, it is possible to win by what feels like ‘doing nothing’. To an outsider, the swordsman does not appear to be doing nothing, but from his own point of view, he is acting spontaneously according to the demands of the moment. Generations of swordsmen found that it conferred such an outstanding advantage that despite the difficulties involved, it was worth pursuing.

The admonitions to ‘do nothing’ and to fight without volition are problematic if taken at face value: indeed, how can you attack your opponent without the intention to attack? Investigation of other classical sources reveal that, in fact, although these admonitions are true in one sense, they should not be taken at face value: there is a lot that is going on. This becomes clear when one reads other writers on swordsmanship writing at around the same period. The *Joseishi Kendan* (Matsuura, 1968) includes an introduction to another work on the Itto school of swordsmanship. This introduction, written by a Confucian scholar, Otaka Toshiaki, clearly explains how the state of no-mind involves an active principle, and it is this that enables the defeat of the enemy. Other aspects are described very much in the same terms as in *Neko no Myojutsu*. The ability to enter this state was primarily the result of hard training, through which techniques became so thoroughly drilled that they could be performed automatically. This process of internalization necessarily included direct reference to the moves of the opponent, as diverse and unexpected as they might be, and it was this additional dimension which made attainment of the higher levels of the art so difficult. The ability to detect and assess the smallest of movements of an opponent and respond in fractions of a second developed abilities which seemed beyond the reach of normal human beings, thus the designation as *myojutsu* – marvelous skills.

The model approach, therefore, is built not only on thoroughly practiced and minutely analyzed techniques, but also a deeply researched understanding of the interaction between adversaries. This seems to have incorporated not only mental training, but to have acquired both a theoretical and procedural understanding of these factors sufficient to allow them to be employed without conscious control. This approach necessitates motivation and the ability to closely observe and correct oneself in the process of training, as well as the ability to analyze and refine one's performance at an ever smaller, micro-level, while not losing sight of the larger considerations of combat.

Despite the metaphysical-sounding terms they employed, most schools of swordsmanship did not consider meditation or similar disciplines necessary or even useful in attaining this state: some spoke expressly against it (Kimura, 1968; Otsuka, 1979). In fact, the higher levels of training

included mental training along with the physical training and thus allowing swordsmen to develop their skills to the highest degree. Each school kept the precise nature of this training secret, but some informed commentators (Kimura, 1968; Matsuura, 1968) suggest that much of this mental training was part and parcel of the normal physical training, and trainees who reached the higher levels were already to some extent familiar with this material from earlier in their training. There are close parallels from modern sports disciplines such as chess. The abilities of grandmasters to play multiple opponents also seem miraculous, but are the result of thousands of hours of memorization and analysis of the myriad opportunities offered by many different positions (Waitzkin, 2008).

If this approach is applied to teaching, we can see that though it takes an effective technical approach as the basis of pedagogy, it proposes the essence of pedagogical effectiveness lies in the details of application, which, in turn, must always be considered in terms of the teacher-student dynamic. It suggests that the ability to act within this dynamic, rather than worrying overmuch about whether or not the students are doing what is required of them, or the nature of the material that is being taught, is of primary importance in the creation of ideal teaching conditions. It includes aspects of the approaches detailed previously, but has developed beyond a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. While the technical approach is dismissed for failing to address the dynamic interaction between the teacher and students, the second and third approaches, while recognizing additional aspects of the pedagogical relationship, rely too strongly on a uni-directional relationship, and lose the ability to react effectively to initiative on the students part by failing to consider the importance of their role in the relationship.

In effect, *myojutsu* suggests that the complex nature of the classroom requires engagement with the reciprocal nature of the teacher-students relationship, and the development of a greater sensitivity to the group dynamics of the classroom. This also means that overly strict planning is unlikely to succeed unless it can be applied with sufficient flexibility to switch between the myriad possibilities that present themselves in the classroom.

While *Neko no Myojutsu* seems to posit a particular mental state that allows this to take place, as we have seen, this is the result of intense, focused training. As for transferring this directly to teaching, the degree to which such a mental state is possible or desirable in the context of education is not strictly relevant. What is more important is whether this model can be usefully applied to the teaching context, to inspire or motivate teachers to refine and develop their pedagogy, or alternatively as a tool for reflection and dialogue. I believe that this is a model of learning and development that presents an approach that allows a motivated learner, in this case a teacher, to take control of their own development. In this sense, it embodies something of the reflective

approach to teaching (Cruikshank & Applegate, 1981), but more properly falls into what has been called the post method paradigm (Kumaravadivelu 2001, 2003), in that it proposes an alternative to method, rather than an alternative method. It is broad enough to include a whole range of methods, by asking the question, what is essential for effectiveness? It challenges the teacher by rejecting simple answers and demanding a need to internalize responses to the complexities of the classroom. Equally important, it re-positions the teacher as a learner who should be continuing to experiment and perfect his/her skill. Thus, in addressing the question of how to teach well, it not only puts the answer squarely in the hands of the practitioner rather than theorists, but also makes the classroom a site of challenge and learning for the teacher as well as the student. It is, of course, but one of many ways of looking at the teaching-learning relationship, but by making the teacher responsible for his/her development it provides a model that is both challenging and empowering.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the pace of change in all areas of society, including the education profession, teaching is still a distinctly human profession, based around the reciprocal roles of teacher and student. The difficulties involved in learning and developing skills are not the sole preserve of this generation, but have been encountered and addressed in numerous ways throughout history. To ignore these is to ignore a resource that can provide valuable insights into some of the problems facing us in the present.

Although the form of a fable may seem quaint in this day and age, the message it delivers is an important one, reinforcing the centrality of the teacher rather than methodologies or technology. It is important to recognize that the “mysterious skill” it describes is the result of much training and application – a relaxed, unconcerned demeanor does not imply an “anything goes” approach. Mastery of material and teaching skill results in an ability to focus on the relationship and control that allows optimum teaching and learning to occur.

## **Appendix**

*Neko no Myojutsu* was written in the form of a fable, giving it both charm and didactic power. In examining its applicability to teaching, it may be helpful to re-imagine it in this form in an educational setting. Presented below is just such a re-imagination.

### **The Mysterious Skills of the Teacher**

It was midway through the first semester in Dokodemo Daigaku. Professor Stoppard was at his

wits' end. His Monday Period 3 class was his worst ever. He had tried everything he could think of, but all he ever got was a bored, disinterested response. It was impossible to interest his students in anything. While he was discussing it in the staff room, some of his colleagues who taught in other departments offered to lend a hand. As he had nothing to lose, he agreed, and invited them to come to the class next Monday.

Next Monday, he explained to his class that three other professors were each going to teach a section of the class for a change. The students barely responded as they lounged in their seats. Each of the teachers came in turn and tried their most interesting lesson plans on the class. Afterwards Professor Stoppard asked them how it had gone. "It was awful," they replied. "What a terrible class – rather you than me," they agreed. Then one of them had an idea. "I know this guy at Asoko Daigaku. I told him about what I was doing today. He seemed interested. Who knows, he might have some ideas".

"Well, okay," said Professor Stoppard, "Bring him along and we'll see."

The following Monday they were all there again. A smallish, non-descript man was standing with the three professors. "Hi, I'm Mike Jones" he said, stepping forward. "Hi, Mike," said Professor Stoppard, "I'll just introduce you to the class, and then it's all yours." He left Mike handing out some papers and went out to chat with the other three professors. Coming back a little while later, they were astonished to see the class hard at work. Mike was answering a few questions, checking on groups here and there, writing one or two things on the blackboard, but he certainly wasn't doing anything special or unusual.

After the class they all gathered around and asked him how he did it. "Let's get a coffee, and I'll explain," he said.

When they were sitting comfortably, he continued, "But first, tell me how you handled the class."

The first professor said, "I've trained at SAT, the British Council and I'm certified as a teacher trainer. I use the communicative method, the Silent Method, suggestopaedia - you name it, I know it. But when I walked into that class, nothing worked. Pair work, small group work, none of it."

"Well, all those techniques have their place, but there's more to it than that. You're working with people – you can't just use a technique."

"That's what I thought," said the second professor. "There's got to be more to it than just technique. You have to control the class. Set the rules, show them who's boss. They might not like it, but they do it. With this lot, though, they just didn't care! I might just as well not have been there!"

"Of course. Why should they care? What's the worst you can do to them? Fail them! They still have to sit through your classes."

The last of the professors spoke up. "That's why I believe it's all to do with understanding them."

You've got to win them onto your side. Get to know them, and then you'll really have fun together in the class. But this class just didn't care. They didn't want to have fun. I tried to involve them in the decisions, to get their input, and they gave me nothing. It was a dead loss."

"You know what it is... they saw through you. They knew you didn't really care about them, it was just part of your image as a caring teacher. And once they saw through you, of course they wouldn't respond."

Everything you've said, all of you, has its place, but it's limited. I walked in there without any preconceptions about the class, but with some ideas about what I wanted to do. I wanted to teach them certain things, have them understand and practice. I didn't particularly mind how we went about this, and I certainly didn't see them as a misbehaving class. I didn't give them anything to misbehave about. I handed out some papers, asked a few questions, gave a few directions, and that was it. The difference was, I was not stuck on my own way of doing things. I have become so familiar with this stuff that I can teach it any number of ways – I know where I'm going, so I don't mind how we get there...

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## 妙 術

### —— 教育者における典型 ——

クリストファー ヘルマン

#### 要 旨

広範な研究が次々となされている言語教育法ではあるが、あまり注目されていない領域もまだある。そうした領域は言語教育に限定された問題ではなく、別の分野の研究からも有効的な洞察を得ることが可能であろう。ここでは18世紀に日本で書かれた剣術に関する論考である『猫の妙術』を詳細に読み解き、現代の言語教育に置き換えて考えてみたい。この作品中で特に注目したいのは、上級技能を獲得させるためのいくつかの方策であり、これらを言語教育という場面に読み換えて考えてみたい。さらに、「妙術」という概念について論じたいので、それを教育者向上のモデルとして考えることを明らかにする。「妙術」の有用性は、熟考と行動とを結びつけ、教育者を自らの向上における活発な行為者たらしめんとする、そうした典型として考えることができるという点である。

キーワード：教育者を向上、言語教育法、剣術、武術、妙術